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RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 6868
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3946
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 4251
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 5770
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 001980

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [VE](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: MAS TO BLOCKADE CONGRESS AMID DIALOGUE TALK

REF: A. LA PAZ 1966
[1](#)B. LA PAZ 1950

Classified By: A/EcoPol Chief Brian Quigley for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Opposition and government representatives met on September 12 to discuss opening a formal dialogue to end the increasingly violent east-west conflict. Those discussions continued September 14 and 15. However, opposition sources concede they have low expectations and are primarily motivated by avoiding the "appearance" that they are not open to dialogue. A government-aligned congressional representative told us President Evo Morales is likewise not disposed to dialogue, despite public comments to the contrary. Opposition contacts warn the September 15 emergency meeting of South American presidents (Unasur) in Santiago is a Venezuelan venture aimed to give Morales a "smokescreen of legitimacy" for a blockade of Congress tomorrow and an eventual crackdown on the opposition Media Luna departments. An opposition source also claims information that one of the "campesino" dead from a September 11 standoff between government and opposition supporters is actually a Bolivian military officer is being withheld pending the outcome of the September 15 Cossio meeting. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) CONALDE, the Bolivian opposition umbrella group of prefects (governors) and civic committee leaders, sent Tarija Prefect Mario Cossio to La Paz September 12 to discuss opening a dialogue with the government. Cossio returned to La Paz September 14 for another meeting with government officials because "we are doing everything in our power" to "open a window of dialogue." Cossio will meet again September 15 with the government, ostensibly directly with President Evo Morales if he returns in time from an emergency meeting of Unasur heads of states held this afternoon in Santiago, Chile.

Preconditions Denied, But Talks About Talks Continue

[1](#)3. (C) Opposition Strategist Javier Flores said Presidency Minister Juan Ramon Quintana and Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera flatly refused to consider preconditions for dialogue: reestablishing hydrocarbon-generated revenue (IDH) for the Departments taken away by the central government and

canceling the planned January 25 constitutional referendum. He said Cossio, CONALDE's designated "dove," would continue the dialogue talks although he was not optimistic they would be fruitful. EcoPol contacts from Santa Cruz said they will continue to press for dialogue for "appearances" if nothing else.

¶4. (C) Opposition Senator Roger Pinto (Podemos, Pando) told us September 15 that he had "zero" confidence Cossio's talks would yield a way forward for a meaningful national dialogue and was only slightly more optimistic about the outcome of the Unasur meeting, which he described as a "public relations maneuver" for the government. Flores added that the summit was the brainchild of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and that a Venezuelan advance party was sent about a week ago to press the Chileans to convoke the event and set the groundwork. He asserted the Unasur conference was designed to provide the "smokescreen of legitimacy" to any eventually crackdown on the Media Luna.

¶5. (C) Pinto and Flores (strictly protect both) agreed that only Brazilian insistence that the opposition also have representation at the event will give it any hope to "offer anything constructive" that the Media Luna might accept. They added that Senate President Oscar Ortiz (Podemos, Santa Cruz) flew to Santiago to represent the opposition's concerns. Flores said Ortiz was not seated at the summit, but was meeting with leaders on the margins and speaking with the media. Separately, opposition contacts tell us President Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva invited Santa Cruz Prefect Costas to Brazil, date and time to be announced.

Opposition Fears Siege on Congress

¶6. (C) Pinto said Morales is especially frantic to line up foreign leaders and governments with sympathetic gestures and statements during the Unasur meeting in order to legitimize an encirclement of the Bolivian Congress early September 16. Similar to prior congressional blockades, MAS supporters would prevent opposition congressmen from entering in order to vote through contentious legislation, in this case a law allowing a constitutional referendum for January 25 and to pass a resolution accusing Pando Prefect Leopoldo Fernandez of "genocide." Pinto said he and other opposition congressmen would try to arrive before the protesters. Many of the Media Luna opposition congressmen are currently outside of La Paz in their home districts, making it difficult to return quickly. Flores estimated 1,000 to 2,000 protesters from El Alto social and labor groups, El Alto and La Paz Civic Committees, and campesino (small farmer) and miner unions/groups from the departments of La Paz and Oruro. RSO contacts confirm the protest. Pinto said if the government proceeded with plans to encircle congress, it would "kill" negotiations.

Keeping Up the "Appearance" of Dialogue

¶7. (C) Flores said President Evo Morales only slipped into the September 14 Cossio meeting during the final minutes and did not seem inclined to negotiate. Ruling Movement Toward Socialism Deputy Ana Lucia Reis (strictly protect) confided that Morales told his congressional supporters that he "feels confident he does not need to negotiate." Reis also said Evo's half-hearted interest in Cossio's meeting will (rightfully) trigger "all the worst fears" of the opposition that Evo is not really serious about dialogue, only "the appearance of dialogue."

Opposition Wild Card: GOB Involved in Pando Violence

¶8. (C) Flores added that the opposition would not reveal that one of the dead "campesinos" in Pando's September 11 violence (reftels) was a Bolivian military officer until after Cossio's September 15 meeting. Flores said the opposition was still trying to decide what to do with the information as

"this would probably ruin all chances for a real dialogue."
He said this would enflame distrust, as it confirms the suspicion that the government is orchestrating "independent" campesino groups against the prefects. Flores accused the government, however, of having no such sensitivities about upsetting the prospects for dialogue as "they were sending troops to Pando at the same time Cossio was landing" for his initial September 12 meeting. (Comment: It is also possible the opposition plans to use the information as leverage during the talks. End Comment.) Cossio may have been referring to the dead soldier when he said publicly September 13 "there are government acts we are deciding to overlook that would normally be enough argument to rupture the dialogue."

Pando's Isolation Impedes Reporting

19. (C) Flores said the opposition is concerned that there are few expatriates, no foreign press, and little Bolivian press in Pando to document what they describe publicly as a "violent military occupation." He said opposition senators from Pando were frantically trying to convince European missions to send a group to Pando's capital of Cobija to ensure any acts against Fernandez's administration are "witnessed."

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